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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether ethical sensitivity can be measured in response to radio programming. The study was interested in the extent to which a person feels a program is unethical in either its substance or its presentation. Subjects, 17 undergraduates in telecommunications at a large midwestern university, received course credit for their participation. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of the four tape orders. All subjects heard all four of the stimuli representing the within subjects factors. Experimental data suggests that ethical sensitivity can be measured in response to both radio news and humor. Comparisons of thought-list and written questionnaire data suggest that while people have more ethical thoughts when specifically questioned about ethics, ethical sensitivity can be measured equally well without probes. Future research in this area seems warranted. (Contains a figure, 2 tables of data, and 46 references.) (Author/NKA)

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Measuring Ethical Sensitivity To Radio Messages

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Abstract

This study asks whether ethical sensitivity can be measured in response to radio programming. Experimental data suggests that ethical sensitivity can be measured in response to both radio news and humor. Comparisons of thought-list and written questionnaire data suggest that while people have more ethical thoughts when specifically questioned about ethics, ethical sensitivity can be measured equally well without probes.

MEASURING ETHICAL SENSITIVITY TO RADIO MESSAGES[1]

Recent legislative discussions concerning violence on television has brought a familiar question once again to the forefront of the media consumer's mind: What kind of programming do I find objectionable? This study is interested in one particular sort of objection that can be raised by a member of the viewing or listening public: the extent to which that person feels a program is unethical in either its substance or its presentation.

Being able to recognize the ethical implications in a situation has been described as a person's level of moral sensitivity (Rest, 1984, 1986, 1994). The importance of investigating moral sensitivity in the study of applied ethics has only recently been recognized (Rest, 1994). This comes as the result of a long history of research into the cognitive development of morality, the totality of which provides the theoretical foundation for the current study.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

A Theory of Developmental Psychology

The theoretical foundation for this research comes from developmental psychology and, more specifically, from a stage concept of individual cognitive development. Piaget (1932/1965) was the pioneer in the area, suggesting that children's personalities develop through an invariant sequence of identifiable stages. Later, Lawrence Kohlberg (1984) elaborated Piaget's construct by applying it to the concept of morality. Kohlberg (1984) was able to show that a person's opinions toward moral dilemmas develop according to a series of six identifiable stages.

Kohlberg's measurement instrument consisted of a series of hypothetical moral dilemmas. In personal interviews, subjects were asked what the individual in the dilemma

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[1] This study was supported in part by a grant from the Institute for Communications Research, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

should do and why. The reasons given by the subject were scored and the subject was thereby categorized as being at a certain level of moral development.

In the 1950s, one of Kohlberg's interviewers was James Rest. He later came to recognize that responses to a Kohlberg dilemma only represented an individual's level of moral judgment (Rest, 1983). In effect, the subject was told that the situation described in the hypothetical story was a moral dilemma; their task was not to recognize it as such, but merely to respond to it. While not discounting the importance of Kohlberg's work, Rest believes that "there are more components to morality than just moral judgment. The trick, however is to identify more precisely what else there is in morality, and how all the pieces fit together." (1994, p. 22) In an attempt to do so, Rest (1984, 1986, 1994) came up with The Four Component Model of morality. The four components are identified as:

Component I: Moral Sensitivity. "Moral Sensitivity is the awareness of how our actions affect other people. It involves being aware of different possible lines of action and how each line of action could affect the parties concerned" (Rest, 1994, p. 23). So, moral sensitivity is the extent to which you can recognize the moral impact of a situation without assistance from others.

Component II: Moral Judgment. Moral judgment determines which course of action within a situation is morally justifiable. Much of the work in the psychology of moral development has been concerned with this component. According to Lind and Rarick (1995), this includes the work of Piaget (1932/1965); Kohlberg (1969, 1976); Gilligan (1982), and Gilligan, Ward, Taylor, and Bardige (1988).

Component III: Moral Motivation. This component has to do with the relative importance a person gives to moral values in the face of competing values. Competing values can include those of a particular profession, aesthetic values, cultural values, and so on (Christians, Rotzoll, Fackler, 1991). So, as Rest describes it, "[d]efficiencies in Component III occur when a person is not sufficiently motivated to put moral values higher than other values. . ." (1994, p. 24).

Component IV: Moral Character. This is the 'proof-is-in-the-pudding' component. A person may be able to recognize a situation as having moral implications, may identify the morally proper choice of action, and value the execution of that action over the execution of competing ones, "but if the person wilts under pressure, is easily distracted or discouraged, is a wimp and weak-willed, then moral failure occurs because of. . .weak character" (Rest, 1994, p. 24).

The application of each of Rest's components to media studies holds exciting possibilities for investigation, and responds to a request made by Rest (1994) himself for research in a diversity of professions to examine how moral cognitions variously develop. This study focuses entirely on the first component of Rest's model--Moral Sensitivity.[2] Very little research has been done in this area. Luckily, some of it has focused on viewer's sensitivity towards television news (Lind, 1992; Lind, 1993; Lind and Rarick, 1991; Lind and Rarick, 1995, Rarick, Lind, and Lepper, 1995). Before examining that, however, it will prove beneficial to encapsulate the ethical sensitivity research that has been done elsewhere.

Ethical Sensitivity Studies in Dentistry and Academe

The research in the area of ethical sensitivity has been sparse compared to the large amount of work done on ethical judgment (Lind and Rarick, 1995, p. 72-73; Bebeau, 1994, p. 123). Still, significant progress has been made by Bebeau and her colleagues (1994; 1985; Baab and Bebeau, 1990; Bebeau, Rest and Yamoor, 1985) in measuring and tracking the development of ethical sensitivity in dental students. Bebeau and Rest (1982) have

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[2] The term "ethical sensitivity" will be employed for the remainder of this manuscript. This follows the terminology first employed by Bebeau and her colleagues (1994; 1985; Baab and Bebeau, 1990; Bebeau, Rest and Yamoor, 1985), whose work is also based on Rest's Four Component Model. Also, this will make later discussions more clear since the terms 'ethics' was used during data collection.

developed the Dental Ethical Sensitivity Test (DEST) which measures student responses to ethical dilemmas in dentistry. The dilemmas were "drawn from dentists' reports of the frequently occurring ethical problems in dentistry" and were pre-tested for realism and technical accuracy by dentists and psychiatrists (Bebeau, Rest and Yamoor, 1985, p. 227).

The DEST has been used to guide other researchers in developing instruments to measure ethical sensitivity. Ernst (1990) has recently adapted the DEST to measure sensitivity towards situations common in the practice of dentistry on geriatric patients. Similarly, an instrument has been developed by McNeel, Frederickson, Talbert, and Lester (1992) which measures the ethical sensitivity level of college students. This instrument consists of tape-recorded scenarios concerning date rape, cheating, alcohol abuse, and racism. Subjects tape-record their responses as if they were offering advice to the main character in each situation. While "[t]hese dramas may sound at first like prime-time soap operas. . . they have turned out to be very convincing, and effective stimuli." (p. 46).

ETHICAL SENSITIVITY APPLIED TO MASS MEDIA

Many of the studies in media ethics have focused on ethical judgment (Component II) rather than ethical sensitivity (Component I).[3] These studies typically present professionals (or students intent on entering the profession) with situations that are pre-identified as moral dilemmas. In a manner similar to Kohlberg's (1984) tests, respondents usually must explain how they would react to the scenarios. Moral dilemmas in the field of journalism are well represented (e.g., Williams, 1995; Hodges, 1995; Erlich, 1995;

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[3]Recent work by Boeyink (1992, 1995) shows casuistry to be a way in which journalists make moral judgments. Some components of the casuistic method seem to implicitly require ethical sensitivity. They include "the identification of a paradigm case and the testing of that case through comparisons with similar cases (analogies)" (Boeyink, 1992, p. 112). Still, Boeyink himself concentrates on the media producer rather than the audience. Also, he admits that "[t]hough the whole enterprise [of casuistry] hangs on separating important from unimportant, we have few clues as to how the casuist sorts them" (p. 113). Ethical sensitivity still remains to be explored.

Pritchard and Morgan, 1989; Ryan and Martinson, 1985; Marion and Izard, 1986; Wulfmeyer, 1989). Research has also explored ethical judgment among photojournalists (Hartley, 1982; Brown, 1987), advertising practitioners (James, Pratt, and Smith, 1994), and public relations professionals (Stacks and Wright, 1989; Pratt and McLaughlin, 1989).

These studies, while unquestionably important, leave several aspects of media ethics unexplored. Of course, when viewed under Rest's (1995) theoretical construct, a body of professional ethics research that concentrates solely on ethical judgment does can not be said to capture the full scope of ethical decision-making within that profession. Perhaps even more striking, however, is the absence of research focusing on the ethical opinions of media audiences. Such a scarcity is perplexing, considering the substantial number of policy and programming decisions that are based upon assumptions of how the audience feels.

The work of Lind and Rarick (1995) responds to both the scarcity of research in ethical sensitivity and the lack of attention paid to members of the audience in media ethics research. Focusing on ethically questionable television news content, they conducted a preliminary and exploratory study to determine if ethical sensitivity could be identified in viewers' reactions to the programs. The results are based on 17 focus groups, with the mean size of each group being 4 participants. During the course of the sessions the participants viewed one of three ethically questionable television news stories. The focus groups were audio-taped, transcribed and analyzed qualitatively for indications of differing levels of ethical sensitivity.

The latest work by Lind and Rarick (Rarick, Lind, and Lepper, 1995) continues investigating audience reaction to television news. However, it replaces the focus group with individual interviews. The technique of cognitive mapping has been employed to better quantify sensitivity levels. Still, the research remains extremely preliminary due to the labor intensive nature of data collection and coding (R. Lind, personal communication, November 26, 1995). This has prevented any analysis of the differences between types of data collection methods. Furthermore, it has delayed attempts to advance this research to the

medium of radio; even though "[r]adio news is not immune from presenting ethically controversial stories" (Lind and Rarick, 1995, p. 81).

In light of the media research literature, therefore, the present study takes several important steps. First, it continues the work of Lind and her colleagues by focusing on both audiences and ethical sensitivity. Plus, it is able to advance the inquiry to the medium of radio. Shifting the study of ethical sensitivity in media audiences to include radio listeners is an important move considering "there is no medium more ubiquitous than radio, no source of information, entertainment, music, sports, weather and business news more pervasive in people's lives" (Mateliski, 1994, p. 5). To leave unexplored the relationships between ethical sensitivity levels and reactions to a medium as prevalent as radio seems shortsighted.

Before discussing the specific research questions of this study, a theoretical discussion of the nature of ethical sensitivity to mediated messages is in order.

Measuring Ethical Sensitivity to Media Messages: Three Ways to Go About It

Independently recognizing the ethical implications of a piece of radio or television programming is an example of Rest's (1994) first component. Due to the nature of the mass media, however, there are three different ways this recognition can take place. While each of them surround programming content that is ethically questionable, the difference is where the responsibility is placed. First, one might recognize that the questionable program is the result of a concerted effort by people engaged in the production process, each of which has "different possible lines of action" which could be taken (Rest, 1994, p. 23). The fact that an ethically questionable line of action has been followed leads the ethically sensitive audience member to find the programming unsatisfactory, and to recognize those who produced it as culpable. This is the conceptual definition of sensitivity that Lind and Rarick employ (1995).

Secondly, an audience member can believe that a piece of content is questionable but only be sensitive to the ethical implications of her own actions--completely independent of considerations of the program's producers. That is, a person may not recognize that a group of media professionals are responsible for the type of material broadcast, but still be sensitive towards her own "different possible lines of action" to the program (does she watch, tune out, laugh, believe the news story, etc.), and "how each line of action affects the parties concerned" (Rest, 1994, p. 23).

The news media provides yet another way for an audience member to exhibit ethical sensitivity. Since news often describes the actions of others, one could be sensitive to the fact that the subject of a news story has perpetrated actions which are ethically questionable. For example, a person might recognize that the crime being reported is an ethical violation of the victims.

CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Measuring Ethical Sensitivity in Radio Audiences

This study attempts to extend the work of Lind and Rarick (1995, Rarick, Lind, and Lepper, 1995, Lind, 1993) to radio broadcasting. The preliminary nature of this research leads to a rather straightforward initial research question:

RQ1: Can ethical sensitivity be identified in listeners' reactions to, and evaluations of, ethically controversial radio content?

Lind and Rarick (1995) define ethically questionable television content as televised material in which moral values compete (p. 71). The conceptual definition of ethically questionable radio content, then, merely shifts that definition to a different medium. Specifically, ethically questionable radio content is content broadcast on the radio in which moral values compete. So, for example, moral values compete in radio newscasts if the

public's right to know is rivaled by a general condemnation of deceptive journalistic practices.

The conceptual definition of ethical sensitivity is adapted from Bebeau, Rest, and Yamoor (1985) who state that it "involves awareness that something one might do or is doing can affect the welfare of someone else (or may affect others' welfare indirectly by violating a general practice or commonly held social standard)" (p. 226). As mentioned above, the nature of the mass media requires that ethical sensitivity to radio programming be conceptually defined in three ways. First, ethical sensitivity is the awareness that something a radio station employee might do or say can affect the welfare of others--either directly, or indirectly by violating a general practice or commonly held social standard. Secondly, ethical sensitivity is the awareness that one's individual response to what is heard on the radio can affect others, either directly or indirectly. Finally, when attending to news, an audience member could be sensitive to the actions being reported on.

Measuring Sensitivity to Humor

This research also examines responses to ethically questionable radio humor. According to some, humor is an essential part of human nature (Hall, Keeter, & Williamson, 1993). However, many agree that there is a point at which jokes go "too far" in trying to illicit laughter (LaFollette and Shanks, 1993; Hall, Keeter, and Williamson, 1993). Sometimes, "going to far" is defined as making fun of particular groups through the use of stereotypes (Day, 1991, Enteman, 1996). Such a stereotypical joke, when told on the radio, becomes an example that fits the conceptual definition of ethically questionable radio content. Still, some have argued that the very nature of humor requires a feeling of superiority (Helitzer, 1987). One wonders if this feeling would cause a decrease in ethical sensitivity levels towards ethically questionable radio humor. However, no research exists that examines the ability to measure ethical sensitivity in responses to humor. As a result,

the relative intensity of ethical sensitivity for humor is also unexplored. Therefore, the second research question is:

RQ2: Can ethical sensitivity be measured in responses to ethically questionable radio humor?

If the results show that one can identify ethical sensitivity in the responses given to humorous stimuli, then an interesting comparison can be made:

RQ3: Are there differences in how individuals respond to ethically questionable radio news compared to ethically questionable radio humor?

The Effects of Different Methods on Sensitivity Measures

Due to the preliminary nature of this research, one of the goals was to identify how different data collection techniques affect the categorization of subjects' ethical sensitivity. Two different methods were employed: thought-listing and written questionnaires. Shapiro (1994) describes the thought-listing procedure as appropriate for determining the patterns of subjects' thoughts as they attend to media messages. More formalized written questionnaires have been used by Bebeau, et al. (1989) to measure ethical sensitivity. This study will explore whether different results are obtained by the two methods:

RQ4: Do different data collection methods result in different levels of ethical sensitivity being assigned to the same subject?

METHODOLOGY

Design

The overall design for this experiment was a 2 (Genre) X 2 (Ethical Questionability) X 4 (Order of presentation) factorial design. Order of presentation was the only between

subjects factor. The within subjects factors were: 1) Genre, with two levels, News and Morning Show Humor; and 2) Ethical Questionability, with two levels, High and Low.

Seventeen subjects were recruited from undergraduate Telecommunications courses at a large midwest university. Subjects received course credit for their participation and each filled out an informed consent form in accordance with university guidelines. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of the four tape orders. All subjects heard all four of the stimuli representing the within subjects factors.

Stimuli

Four radio messages were used for this experiment. The two messages representing News were created for this experiment. Each of them utilized a news anchor in the studio and inserted audio from another person obtained on a phone line. The first story uncovered a kickback scheme being organized by a member of a local school board. The phone call featured audio entrapment of the school board member without her knowledge (hereafter, Kick Back). The second story described the aftermath of a train crash that had taken place outside of Washington, D.C. The phone call was an actuality from a reporter on location (hereafter, Train Crash).

The two messages representing Morning Show Humor were tape recordings of actual morning show broadcasts from a midwestern radio station. One of them consisted of a man's story about killing a rattlesnake that he had found while playing basketball with friends in Los Angeles (hereafter, Killing Snake). The other was a fake commercial for a product called the Invisible Leash (hereafter, Invisible Leash). This product was designed for adults whose elderly parents kept wandering away from home. Similar to invisible barriers used to keep pets in the yard, the Invisible Leash would give grandparents "a noticeable, but basically harmless, 125-volt zap" if they wandered too far off the property.

Pre-Test Procedures

Prior to the experiment, all four messages were pre-tested for their level of ethical questionability. The pre-test subjects were told to define ethics as whether the station was right or wrong in airing each piece. Data was obtained using a seven-point scale, where 1=Very Right and 7=Very Wrong. Within each genre, t-tests show that messages designed to be ethically questionable were significantly different than those that were not. Kick Back (M=4.82) was significantly more ethically questionable than Train Crash (M=2.0) ($p<.000$). Invisible Leash (M=6.00) was significantly more ethically questionable than Killing Snake (M=3.91) ($p<.004$).

PROCEDURES

Though Listing

Subjects were randomly assigned to different tape orders. The procedures were administered to subjects in groups ranging in size from 2 to 4 subjects. Subjects were told that the researcher was interested in their reactions to things they might hear on the radio. They were instructed to pay close attention to the content of each of the four messages, and to assume that each had been taped off the air. Messages were played one at a time. The subjects' initial task was thought-listing. Using a modified thought-list procedure (Branovan, 1996), subjects were told to write down "key words" representing every thought they had during the course of the message (Shapiro, 1994). After each message was over, subjects were given time to go back and completely describe their thoughts. The thought-listing procedure was rehearsed using a practice message and subjects' questions were answered before the experiment began.

Written Questionnaires

After all four messages had been played, subjects were briefly questioned by the researcher to ensure that each message could be recalled. Then, written questionnaires were administered. Subjects were told to do five things:

1. Write down how they would describe each of the messages to a friend who had not heard them.
2. Fully describe their reactions to each message.

3a. Assume the role of News Director, decide if they would have let the news stories be broadcast, and describe the reasons for their decisions.

3b. Assume the role of Program Director (defined as "the one ultimately responsible for what is broadcast"), decide if they would have let the humorous segments be broadcast, and describe the reasons for their decisions.

4. Fully describe any ethical issues they perceived in any of the segments.

Each instruction appeared on a separate piece of paper, in a written procedure similar to the funnel-type of interview technique used by Lind and Rarick (1995). After responding to a question, subjects handed their answers in to a moderator before receiving the next one. The questions were handed out separately to prevent the explicit prompting from Statement #4 to taint the answers of previous questions.

After they had completed all of the questions, respondents provided demographic information, were thanked, and dismissed.

CODING

The thought-lists and questionnaires from a subset of the total number of subjects were read by both the researcher and a second trained coder. Inter-coder reliability was achieved to an 80 percent level on this subset, with disputed items being settled by discussion and consensus. The remaining data was coded by one of the two coders.

Coding for the thought-lists consisted of counting the total number of thoughts identifying any ethical characteristics in the message. Coding for the written questionnaires took place in a two step process. First, the total number of ethical thoughts was counted for each message. Second, each subject was given a Global Ethical Sensitivity Score for News (ESN) and for Humor (ESH). These global scores were assigned according to which question in the questionnaire (listed above) first prompted an ethical statement from the subject.

The following categorization scheme was used:

Ethical Response in Question #	Global Score
1	Very High
2	High
3a	Medium(News)
3b	Medium (Humor)
4	Low
Never	Very Low

ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed using a mixed 2(Ethical Questionability) X 2(Genre) X 2 (Method) X 4(Order of Presentation) ANOVA. The within subject factors are: Genre, with two levels, radio news and morning show humor; Ethical Questionability, with two levels, high and low; and Method, with two levels, thought-lists and written questionnaires. The Order of Presentation factor is the only between subjects factor and represents the four orders of message presentation.

Planned comparisons were performed using one way ANOVAs and t-tests. There were no significant main effects or interactions with Order of Presentation in the analysis.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

This research question asks whether ethical sensitivity can be measured in response to radio stimuli. The main effect for Ethical Questionability was significant ($F(1,13)=38.14$, $p<.000$, epsilon squared=.7262) with a greater number of ethical responses being made to ethically questionable messages ($M=1.52$) than ethically non-questionable messages ($M=.37$).

There is also a significant Ethical Questionability X Method interaction ($F(1,13)=16.67$, $p<.001$, epsilon squared=.5283). This interaction can be seen in Figure 1, with the means represented in Table 1.

FIGURE 1:
MEAN NUMBER OF ETHICAL THOUGHTS PER MESSAGE

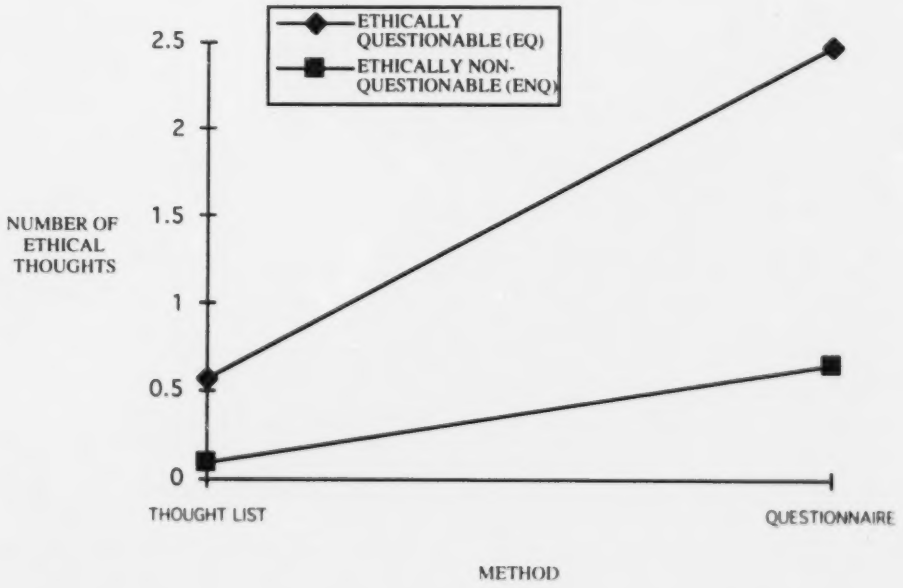

Table One: Mean Number of Ethical Thoughts By Method

MESSAGE TYPE	THOUGHT LIST	QUESTIONNAIRE
ETHICALLY NON-QUESTIONABLE (ENQ)	.09	.65
ETHICALLY QUESTIONABLE (EQ)	.56	2.47

Because of the significant interaction, separate ANOVAs were run on the thought-list and written questionnaire data.

The main effect for Ethical Questionability on the thought-list data was significant ($F(1, 13)=14.15$, $p<.002$, epsilon squared=.4837). As hoped for, subjects had more ethical thoughts for ethically questionable messages (M=.56) than for ethically non-questionable stories (M=.09).

The main effect for Ethical Questionability on the written questionnaire data was also significant ($F(1,13)=29.47$, $p<.000$, epsilon squared=.6708). Once again, the means were in the direction that might be expected--with more ethical responses being made to the ethically questionable messages (M=2.47) than the ethically non-questionable messages (M=.65).

Research Question 2

This question asked whether ethical sensitivity could be measured in responses given to radio humor. The question was tested separately using planned comparisons on both the thought-list data and the written questionnaire data. In both, the research question asked whether subjects had more ethical thoughts in response to the ethically questionable humorous message (Invisible Leash) than the ethically non-questionable humorous message (Killing Snake). The means for each message are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean Ethical Thoughts for Humorous Messages

Message	Thought List	Questionnaire
Ethically Non-Questionable (ENQ)	.18	.53
Ethically Questionable (EQ)	.76	2.59

In the thought-list data, t-tests performed on the mean number of ethical thoughts showed the ethically questionable message (Invisible Leash) to be significantly different from the ethically non-questionable message (Killing Snake) ($t=2.42$, $p<.028$). Means were in the expected direction, with Invisible Leash ($M=.76$) evoking more ethical statements than Killing Snake ($M=.18$).

Similarly, t-tests performed on the mean number of ethical thoughts in the written questionnaires showed Invisible Leash ($M=2.59$) to be significantly different from Killing Snake ($M=.53$) ($t=3.92$, $p<.001$).

Research Question 3

This research question asked if there was a difference between subjects' ethical sensitivity to humor and news. This question was tested by the main effect for Genre which was not significant ($F(1,13)=2.64$, $p<.13$).

Separate ANOVAs were performed on the thought-list and written questionnaire data. The effect of Genre was significant for the thought-lists ($F(1,13)=6.16$, $p<.028$, epsilon squared=.2695). The means for humor ($M=.47$) were higher than those for news ($M=.18$).

There was no significant main effect for Genre in the written questionnaire data ($F(1,13)=2.64$, $p<.128$). The means do go in the direction of the thought-list data, however, with more ethical thoughts listed for humor ($M=1.56$) than for news ($M=1.24$).

The written questionnaire data was coded for Global Ethical Sensitivity Scores for both news (ESN) and humor (ESH). These global scores were assigned according to how quickly a subject mentioned ethical considerations. Planned comparisons using t-tests showed no significant differences between the two global scores ($t=-.21$, $p<.835$).

Research Question 4

This question asked if different data collection methods result in different levels of ethical sensitivity being assigned to the same subject. This question was tested by combining the data obtained for both stories within each method. The research question asked whether there was a difference in the number of ethical responses made by thought-lists and written questionnaires. This was tested by the main effect for Method on the combined data set. The main effect for Method is significant ($F(1,13)=53.05$, $p <.000$, epsilon squared=.7881). The mean number of ethical thoughts obtained using questionnaires was greater ($M=3.12$) than thought-lists ($M=.65$).

DISCUSSION

There is a long line of research on ethical reasoning and judgments made by individuals. It is typical of such research to inform subjects that the situations they will be responding to are ethical in nature. While these studies are unarguably worthwhile, they do not identify an individual's ability to independently recognize the ethical dimensions of scenarios. That is, they do not examine a person's ethical sensitivity. Knowledge of how ethical sensitivity develops, and how it influences actions, is extremely important in media studies. Without an ability to recognize that media events represent conflicting ethical interests, an ability to reason through those conflicts and take appropriate action is moot.

This study assessed an individual's ethical sensitivity to radio messages. That is, it looked at the ability of a listener to independently recognize ethical questions embedded in radio programming. Results suggest that radio messages do act as adequate stimuli for

measuring ethical sensitivity in listeners. Messages that were pre-tested as being ethically questionable were independently judged as such by subjects using both thought-listing and written questionnaires.

Results also suggest a difference in the way thought-listing and written questionnaires access ethical sensitivity. Subjects gave more ethical responses on the questionnaires. This is most likely due to the final written question which specifically asks the subjects to describe any ethical issues they heard in the radio messages. These findings raise an interesting theoretical issue. Rest (1994) suggests that ethical sensitivity is the ability to recognize competing moral issues without outside assistance. Under this definition, the thought-list procedure seems the most stealthy and therefore most appropriate. However, the definition also precludes the responses given to the final written question as being an indication of sensitivity. This seems unnecessarily stringent, especially considering several times when written responses exhibited ethical implications that not even the researcher had considered (such as the racial diversity of the voices on the tape or the ethical implication of killing an animal). Future studies should continue to explore the nature of ethical sensitivity and the best ways to measure it.

Finally, this study obtained conflicting results concerning differences in ethical sensitivity levels towards radio news and humor. There are several reasons why one should be cautious when interpreting the genre data, however. First of all, this experiment had only one message representing each condition. Secondly, we are unsure of the relative weight of ethical questionability in each story. That is, the ethically questionable news story may be less so than the ethically questionable humorous piece. Still, the presence of two non-significant effects of genre seems to suggest that we may not be more ethically sensitive to news simply because of an implicit understanding of the nature of humor. Future research in this area seems warranted.

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